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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

History of Labor in the United States. By JOHN R. COMMONS and Associates. New York: Macmillan, 1918. Two volumes, pp. xxv+623; xx+620. \$6.50.

This first fairly complete and authoritative history of American labor movements is the result of the combined efforts of the best-known student of American labor history and his students from the time he went to the University of Wisconsin in 1904 to the date of publication. Through the efforts of Professor Ely a fund had been secured for the purpose of collecting materials relating to the American labor movement. *The Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, published in 1910, contains about one-tenth of the valuable documentary materials unearthed by the survey of the field of American labor literature. Over thirty investigators having access to the collected material have written monographs and articles which have been used in connection with the two volumes under consideration.

The *History* consists of an Introduction, written by Professor Commons, and six parts: Part I, "Colonial and Federal Beginnings (to 1827)," by David J. Saposs; Part II, "Citizenship (1827-1833)," by Helen L. Sumner; Part III, "Trade Unionism (1833-1839)," by Edward B. Mittleman; Part IV, "Humanitarianism (1840-1860)," by Henry E. Hoagland; Part V, "Nationalization (1860-1877)," by John B. Andrews; and Part VI, "Upheaval and Reorganization (since 1876)," by Selig Perlman.

These volumes constitute a history of American labor philosophies, movements, and conditions, but not, as might reasonably be expected, a history of various labor organizations or of the policies and structures of unions. The keynote or thesis is given in a sentence found in the Introduction. The labor history of the United States "is the story of how, in the course of three centuries, the wage earner, as a distinct class, has been gradually, even violently, separating himself from the farmer, the merchant, and the employer, and coming to feel that his standing and progress in society depend directly on wages and not directly on prices, rents, profits, or interest." The history of labor in the United States is distinguished from that of European countries (1) because of the presence

of free land down to a comparatively recent date; (2) because of the early acceptance of manhood suffrage; (3) because of the wide expanse of territory, which allowed extensive market areas; (4) because of Negro slavery in the South and the extraordinary influx of immigrants; and (5) because of the American constitutional and judicial systems which have forced labor to resort to trade-union action in regard to demands which in other countries have been granted by legislation (I, 4-10).

After presenting these conditioning circumstances, which are purely American, the authors proceed to develop the philosophy, aims, and methods of labor around a theory of marketing or bargaining. As the market area is enlarged and as newer and newer competitive fields appear, the difficulties confronting the wageworkers are transformed and their attitude toward labor organizations undergoes modifications. This theory is held with tenacity. It is the thesis outlined in Professor Commons' study of the evolution of the shoemaking industry.¹ Too much reliance is placed upon the phenomena connected with this one industry. And, let it not be forgotten, the most striking phenomenon in the history of unionism in the American shoemaking industry, the Knights of St. Crispin, was a protest "against the abuse of machinery"² rather than a consequence of changes in marketing conditions. The struggle in the early shoe industry, resulting from the enlargement of the market area, against inferior and unskilled workers and lower wages is not dissimilar to that which later occurred in the same industry or in the molding industry when the machine was introduced. A similar struggle is likely to occur in any industry when a new situation is developed, whether as the result of widening the market area, the introduction of new machinery, the influx of immigrants, or other causes.

The reviewer is of the opinion that no single-track explanation of the evolution of the labor movement is sufficient. Different labor organizations come into being as a consequence of very different combinations and balances of social forces.³ Indeed, other explanations have crept into the pages of the work under review. For example, on page 4 of Volume II, four reasons are presented for the nationalization of the labor movement, of which expansion of the market is one. The national organization of the cigar-makers is attributed (II, 69) to the growth of

¹ "American Shoemakers, 1648-1895," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XXIV (November, 1909), 39-84.

² Lescohier, *The Knights of St. Crispin*, p. 59; also, Commons, "American Shoemakers," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XXIV, 72-75.

³ See article in the *Scientific Monthly* (August, 1916), p. 157; also Hoxie, *Trade Unionism in the United States*.

large business on account of the internal-revenue tax imposed at the time of the Civil War.

If, however, a single-track explanation is held to be fitting and desirable, the reviewer may be permitted to call attention to the encroachments of the unskilled, the "green hand," the immigrant, or the foreigner upon the occupation of the skilled as the prime cause of labor organizations. As is pointed out by the authors, the first organizations of wage-workers were among the skilled men and not among the factory workers. As the market area widened, as machinery was introduced, as immigration became considerable, or as the development of "merchant-capitalists" made it more difficult for the journeyman to become an independent producer, organizations of wagedworkers begin to appear. Discontent, revolutions, and labor unions first develop among those who are not at the bottom of the heap. "Really effective discontent must have a base of supplies." The skilled men, as well as others in more recent years, organized to protect themselves from threatened encroachments of one kind or another upon their standard of living; but the power to pound down wages or to prevent increases came with increased opportunity to introduce the green hand and lower-paid workers or the products of such workers produced elsewhere.

A few minor criticisms are offered with some hesitancy. Insufficient emphasis is placed upon the rôle played by workingmen in forcing the adoption of the free-school system. No attempt apparently is made adequately to account for the interesting phenomena of the "hot-air" period of the forties and early fifties—humanitarianism and the lack of "pure and simple" unionism. The former is not unrelated to the rise of manufacture and relative decline of commercial enterprise in the East and the consequent shift of the center of social gravity in the world of affairs.¹ And the latter is closely connected with the growth of the railway net, the influx of immigrants into the East, and the westward movement of the native-born. A careful analysis of the phenomena of this unique period should have been made. In the era since 1876 the reviewer ventures the opinion that too much space is devoted to the revolutionary movements among the workingmen in comparison with that given to the evolution of business unionism.

An extensive bibliography of the sources utilized and an excellent index are provided.

FRANK T. CARLTON

ALBION COLLEGE

¹ Carlton, "Humanitarianism, Past and Present," *International Journal of Ethics*, October, 1906.